

Week of September 30, 2002: MDOT Flash Facts

Topic: First Frost, Black Ice, Bridges Freeze First

Monday

Overnight freezes are upon us. Even a little frozen moisture on the road can create a very dangerous situation.

Facts:

During the past three Octobers, there have been 25 ice related crashes in Maine and nearly 500 crashes during the month of November.

- Black ice is a thin, nearly invisible, coating of ice on the pavement.
 - You may not see it at all
 - It may just look like a damp or wet spot
 - It can happen any time when roads are wet, in rain, mist or fog conditions, BUT also when moisture in the air settles onto cold pavement and freezes.
 - It often happens just before dawn
 - Bridges and overpasses are susceptible to icing. (It is true that 'Bridges may freeze before Roadway', because the cold temperatures are circulating both above and beneath the road surface.)

Even a thin layer of ice comes between your tires and the pavement, makes driving very hazardous.

Tips:

Be alert for signs that black ice might be forming:

- Listen to weather and road reports
- Watch for signs of freezing on your windshield, mirrors, or roadside objects, but remember that sometimes only the road is icy.
- Be especially careful in areas that are shady, along embankments, on and under bridges and overpasses, and in wet areas and near bodies of water.
- Be suspicious of shiny or wet looking pavement when temperatures are cold.

Wednesday

Colder temperatures are becoming more common overnight. It's not too early to think about problems of ice on the roads. Black ice is a particular concern this time of year.

Drive carefully in cold temperatures - maintain a safe speed and always wear your seatbelt.

If you suspect ice:

- slow down before downhill sections (put into low gear and do not let momentum build.)
- take curves slowly, maintaining your vehicle under control.
- maintain proper following distance (when slippery, at least a four second following distance is recommended.)
- avoid making sudden changes (an abrupt turn, brake or acceleration on a slippery road can quickly cause loss of control).
- never slam on your brakes. (skidding on the ice will cause slight melting under the tire, making the road surface even more slippery.)

- avoid passing.
- If your wheels lock, briefly ease off the brakes, then re-apply them to maintain vehicle control. If you have ABS brakes, maintain constant pressure on the brake pedal.
- If roads are slippery, turn off the cruise control. (you do not want unnecessary power to the wheels when roads are slippery.)
- Test the road surface by lightly tapping your brakes, but only if no other vehicles are nearby.

Remember, black ice is a severe hazard for all vehicles. Four-wheel drive provides no advantage when braking on ice, under any circumstance.

Friday

Black ice can cause a multi-vehicle chain reaction crash.

If you do get in a crash due to black ice, be aware that other drivers behind you may also lose control (get yourself and all passengers out of harm's way).

Tires with good tread and proper pressure (do not under-inflate) are important in bad weather driving. However on ice, traction is extremely difficult, so keeping the vehicle under control is your major defense.

Handling a skid:

1. Ease off the accelerator and do not brake (If you have ABS brakes, maintain constant pressure on the brake pedal)
2. -If the rear of the vehicle is skidding right - steer smoothly to the right.
-If the rear of the vehicle is skidding left - steer smoothly to the left.

-Be careful not to over-steer!

-Additional adjustments may be needed, and if so, follow the skid right/ steer right or skid left/ steer left steps.

If you find yourself in a skid, try to keep an eye on the nearby traffic activity and your surroundings. Look in the direction you want to go (hand-eye reaction does work).